

OBITUARY

KENNETH ANGUS SPENCER
1916–2002

Kenneth Angus Spencer was born on the 16th March 1916 in Cheam, Surrey. He married Ann Campion Deveraux Berridge on 2nd December 1950, and together they raised three daughters, Kitty, Fanny and Susie. His wife Ann was a talented artist and draughtswoman, for which we all should be grateful. He died peacefully on 27th July 2002 in Callington, in the County of Cornwall, attended by his family.

He was educated at Whitgift School, not far from his home in Cheam. He gained his BA in German, French and Italian in 1937 at University College, London and was awarded a DSc in 1970 at his old College, for his work and publications on the family Agromyzidae. In 1992 he was honoured by the Linnean Society with the H. H. Bloomer Award, bestowed for important contributions to biological knowledge by an amateur naturalist. He also received a number of other awards from other countries (see *Flycatcher* later).

Ken's interest in Natural History had begun from an early age with encouragement from his elder brother Geoffrey, and by 12 he was collecting anything he could. When he moved to London in his late 'teens he joined the South London Entomological and Natural History Society, mainly collecting butterflies.

Ken's introduction to Diptera occurred in 1949 when, through the same Society, he was asked to translate from German into English, Professor Erich Hering's book *Biology of the Leaf Miners*. This he did with much correspondence with the author and it was published in 1951. Subsequently, his 'day job', which was selling printing equipment, enabled him to travel to Germany and meet Professor Hering and both developed a deep and sincere friendship for each other lasting until Hering's death in 1967. Through this friendship, Ken developed an interest in leaf miners and the Agromyzidae in particular. The Agromyzidae became an obsession, and the rest is history!

It was during the early 1950s that he started collecting leafmines and breeding out the flies, publishing his findings and persuading others of the fascination of these little creatures. One of his converts was a certain Mr. G.C.D. Griffiths!

My own connection with Ken began in 1979–80 when Diane and I decided to concentrate on the Agromyzidae during a survey of Diptera at Malham Tarn, a site of Special Scientific Interest in North Yorkshire, England run by the then Warden, Dr Henry Disney. They seemed ideally suited to our poor sighted eyes, having, we assumed, obvious leaf mines and hence very easily found. All we had to do was to go round collecting the static diagnostic mines rather than fast, small and specifically similar flies. How wrong we were, and in trying to understand the literature I wrote to Dr Spencer, sending some specimens for confirmation and a few which we felt must be new to science! Some months elapsed before we received a letter, apologising for the delay, but setting us to rights with our completely wrong diagnostics and naming our new specimens among the more common agromyzids for Britain. However, this introduction led to sporadic correspondence and wholehearted encouragement to collect, collect and then collect some more. Ken sent us reprints of most of his papers. In late 1982, Ken wrote to me asking advice on suitable methods and chemicals for the treatment of plant material for import/export. After this we communicated regularly and we even acted as sounding boards for some of his ideas and propositions before going into print and we frequently assisted with the preparation of tables and indexes and typing his terrible small scribble. After complaining that we could not cope with more than three sheets of script at a time, and this was agreed upon, the next letter to arrive did indeed contain only three sheets, however one of them consisted of about twenty short pieces of paper, pinned, glued and stapled together like a lace curtain and totalling about three A4 lengths of paper.

Ken was a very disciplined and organised worker, if miserly with his paper supply, rising early and working on agromyzids until midday and lunch, after which he would generally do gardening or other domestic chores in the afternoon. Bedtime was usually between nine and ten. We are not very organised, certainly not early risers but after the day-job, working in the evenings on entomology, sometimes until the early hours of the next day, and so it was somewhat disconcerting to be woken at six in the morning with a bright cheery voice just wanting a chat, or checking on the progress of some project of the moment. By flatly refusing to answer the telephone before seven, and then 8 o' clock in the morning, we finally weaned him from very early telephone calls and even had him sometimes phoning in the evenings—when we were awake!

Ken was a workaholic, never satisfied until a project was completed to the best of his ability, whether it was as interpreter and intelligence officer in the army; salesman, manager and director of a printing equipment company, or entomologist. He demanded no less from any of his colleagues and acquaintances. Friendship was not always an easy ride, but it was always a very rewarding experience and a privilege.

Ken had one great disappointment in his life—that he never received regular employment in an Institution as an entomologist and therefore always considered himself an 'amateur'. However, as I have said elsewhere, Ken was a leading professional in his own field, being contracted by governments and Institutions alike to do a job of work for which he was amply qualified. Like many medical men, lawyers or architects he earned his money from his expertise, the definition of a professional. It was just that money does not flow so readily for entomologists as it does for the others.

In all, Ken described and named 1240 species of Agromyzidae of which only 97 have subsequently proved to be synonyms, a mere 8% and a rare achievement.

I should point out that this rather anecdotal valedictory is only possible because he has left a very detailed account of his life in his 1992 book *Flycatcher* published by

SPB Academic Publishing of Holland. It is not only an autobiography in some depth of an outstanding dipterist, but incorporates much information on the Agromyzidae which has not been published in his other works and, above all, it contains commentaries on the many famous dipterists and other notable people he came into contact with over the years.

The loss of Ken has created a considerable gap in the ranks of the elder statesmen of the entomological community. Whilst his specialist work set him apart from the more generalist entomologists, his high output of publications, so ably assisted by his wife Ann, made him a leader of communication and an example to us all.

In appreciation of 22 years friendship.

DAVID HENSHAW

BOOK REVIEW

A Butterfly Notebook by Douglas Hammersley. (Lewes: The Book Guild, 2003) 140 pp. Hardbound £25.00. ISBN 1 85776 722 5

Anyone who appreciates the artistry of *Benningfield's Butterflies* or the precision of Richard Lewington's work, will be delighted with Doug Hammersley's illustrations, published under the title of *A Butterfly Notebook*. He has captured grace of movement in addition to natural beauty, with a nice blend of scientific accuracy and art. To complement the paintings, Doug has written interesting and amusing accounts of his observations, describing the images of courtship, feeding and pairing shown on the facing pages, and offering anecdotes that reflect the changes in distribution and scarcity over his lifetime.

A skilled medical illustrator by profession, and keen naturalist in retirement, the author has created a 'notebook' of the butterflies of his acquaintance; most of the British species, with a smattering of attractive Continental species now extinct in Britain. Each picture is accompanied by his notes, from Northumberland to West Harling Forest, close to his Norfolk home, and from occasional forays to the Pyrenees and the Adriatic. As the illustrations are so much larger than life, he includes one life-size image on each page as a point of reference. In some cases, the larger pictures serve very nicely to assist with identification, and to highlight the points of difference between two similar species. Reading his account of the features separating Small and Essex Skippers leaves a clearer understanding than many of the field guides, for example. The volume is nicely produced, and the choice of paper has catered well for the reproduction of texture and fine brush-work, without generating the reflection that often spoils glossy photographs. There is only one photograph, and that is a whimsical portrait inside the dust cover, capturing the author in a moment of repose.

So this is neither a comprehensive work of reference, nor a superficial coffee table book. It falls nicely into the niche of what many lepidopterists would like to find in their Christmas stocking; a book to read and re-read, images to view with pleasure. I expect it to become one of my favourites.

ROB PARKER